GCSE English Language Surgery

Extract 1: *Stoner* by John Williams

The following extract is taken from the beginning of a novel called 'Stoner'.

Annotate in the space around the extract:

William Stoner entered the University of Missouri as a freshman in the year 1910, at the age of nineteen. Eight years later, during the height of World War I, he received his Doctor of Philosophy degree and accepted an instructorship at the same University, where he taught until his death in 1956. He did not rise above the rank of assistant professor, and few students remembered him with any sharpness after they had taken his courses. When he died his colleagues made a memorial contribution of a medieval manuscript to the University library. This manuscript may still be found in the Rare Books Collection, bearing the inscription: "Presented to the Library of the University of Missouri, in memory of William Stoner, Department of English. By his colleagues."

An occasional student who comes upon the name may wonder idly who William Stoner was, but he seldom pursues his curiosity beyond a casual question. Stoner's colleagues, who held him in no particular esteem when he was alive, speak of him rarely now; to the older ones, his name is a reminder of the end that awaits them all, and to the younger ones it is merely a sound which evokes no sense of the past and no identity with which they can associate themselves or their careers.

He was born in 1891 on a small farm in central Missouri near the village of Booneville, some forty miles from Columbia, the home of the University. Though his parents were young at the time of his birth—his father twenty-five, his mother barely twenty—Stoner thought of them, even when he was a boy, as old. At thirty his father looked fifty; stooped by labour, he gazed without hope at the arid patch of land that sustained the family from one year to the next. His mother regarded her life patiently, as if it were a long moment that she had to endure. Her eyes were pale and blurred, and the tiny wrinkles around them were enhanced by thin greying hair worn straight over her head and caught in a bun at the back.

From the earliest time he could remember, William Stoner had his duties. At the age of six he milked the bony cows, slopped the pigs in the sty a few yards from the house, and gathered small eggs from a flock of spindly chickens. And even when he started attending the rural school eight miles from the farm, his day, from before dawn until after dark, was filled with work of one sort or another. At seventeen his shoulders were already beginning to stoop beneath the weight of his occupation.

It was a lonely household, of which he was an only child, and it was bound together by the necessity of its toil. In the evenings the three of them sat in the small kitchen lighted by a single kerosene lamp, staring into the yellow flame; often during the hour or so between supper and bed, the only sound that could be heard was the weary movement of a body in a straight chair and the soft creak of a timber giving a little beneath the age of the house.

where the family spent most of its little time together. On the other side were two bedrooms, each furnished with an iron bedstead enamelled white, a single straight chair, and a table, with a lamp and a wash basin on it. The floors were of unpainted plank, unevenly spaced and cracking with age, up through which dust steadily seeped and was swept back each day by Stoner's mother.

At school he did his lessons as if they were chores only somewhat less exhausting than those around the farm. When he finished high school in the spring of 1910, he expected to take over more of the work in the fields; it seemed to him that his father grew slower and more weary with the passing months.

But one evening in late spring, after the two men had spent a full day hoeing corn, his father spoke to him in the kitchen, after the supper dishes had been cleared away.

"County agent come by last week."

William looked up from the red-and-white-checked oilcloth spread smoothly over the round kitchen table. He did not speak.

"Says they have a new school at the University in Columbia. They call it a College of Agriculture. Says he thinks you ought to go. It takes four years."

"Four years," William said. "Does it cost money?"

"You could work your room and board," his father said. "Your ma has a first cousin owns a place just outside Columbia. There would be books and things. I could send you two or three dollars a month."

William spread his hands on the tablecloth, which gleamed dully under the lamplight. He had never been farther from home than Booneville, fifteen miles away. He swallowed to steady his voice.

"Think you could manage the place all by yourself?" he asked.

"Your ma and me could manage. I'd plant the upper twenty in wheat; that would cut down the hand work."

William looked at his mother. "Ma?" he asked.

She said tonelessly, "You do what your pa says."

"You really want me to go?" he asked, as if he half hoped for a denial. "You really want me to?"

His father shifted his weight on the chair. "I never had no schooling to speak of," he said, looking at his hands. "I started working a farm when I finished sixth grade. Never held with schooling when I was a young 'un. But now I don't know. Seems

How has the writer structured the text to interest you as a reader?

What is the writer showing the reader?	How is the writer showing the reader this? (Quotation + Structural Feature)	Why is the writer showing the reader this?
		Reason 1: Reason 2: Reason 3:
		Reason 1: Reason 2: Reason 3:
		Reason 1: Reason 2: Reason 3:
		Reason 1: Reason 2: Reason 3:

1. How is the end of the extract different from the beginning?

2. At what point does this change/ difference begin to occur? Why does the change occur?

How has the writer structured the text to interest you as a reader?

Use phrases like: *At the beginning of the text, the writer establishes… / As the text progresses, the writer switches the focus from ____ to ____ because… / This is structurally significant because from this, the reader learns… / Perhaps the writer does this to…*